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ECONOMIC, SOCIAL AND CULTURAL RIGHTS

Written statement submitted by Pax Christi International, International Catholic Peace Movement, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[30 December 1999]

GE.00-10585 (E)

Economic sanctions, the United Nations and Iraq

1. Pax Christi International has repeatedly called for reducing, reshaping and quickly ending the economic sanctions against Iraq that have brought such suffering to the Iraqi people. Pax Christi International requests with great urgency that the United Nations Commission for Human Rights consider and take action to amend the application of economic sanctions against Iraq since they unfairly target the civilian population. They violate human rights and serve as a silent killer since they deprive civilians of access to the means of subsistence necessary for life. In Iraq they have been in place for nine years and have failed to impact the regime of Saddam Hussein as they were intended to do. They violate a fundamental principle of international law, namely that innocent people may not be directly targeted in order to destroy a Government. Dennis Halliday, the former United Nations Humanitarian Relief Coordinator in Iraq, resigned his position in 1998 after seeing first-hand the effects of the sanctions, which he described as "genocidal". Says Halliday, "We are destroying an entire society. It is as simple and as terrifying as that."

2. Pax Christi International agrees with the United States Catholic Bishops' Conference that the grounds for strong international action against Iraq were and are justifiable: "reversing and deterring aggression against neighbouring States, protecting domestic minorities, and preventing the development of weapons of mass destruction." We also agree that "even honourable causes may not be defended with immoral means. Such is the case of embargoes that contribute to untimely death, chronic illness, and reduced life-expectancy among innocent civilians." The United States bishops acknowledge – and Pax Christi International endorses - that the primary responsibility for resolving outstanding disputes between Iraq and the international community belongs to the Iraqi Government. So too does that Government bear primary responsibility for the failure of humanitarian efforts because of its deliberate diversion and misallocation of resources within Iraq (statement by Msgr. Joseph A. Fiorenza, President of the Conference, on 15 November 1999). However that does not take away the responsibility of the international community for the plight of the Iraqi people. According to the Geneva Conventions, economic sanctions must comprise a humanitarian exemption to permit relief operations if the health or nutrition situation so requires. International humanitarian law sets minimum standards which must be respected as an absolute minimum. Economic sanctions should not condemn civil society to live below subsistence level and certainly not for a prolonged period. So there is a need for a minimum standard which is higher than a mere guarantee for survival. The current comprehensive sanctions are unacceptable and must be replaced by more humane arrangements. In considering the effects of the sanctions against Iraq, the international community should keep in mind that many historians see the long vindictive sanctions imposed on Germany after the First World War as a major factor in causing the Second World War.

3. Economic sanctions and the policies of the Government of Iraq have prevented Iraq from rebuilding its infrastructure, which was severely damaged during the Gulf war. Raw sewage flows in the streets. Broken water purification systems increasingly contaminate water, spreading disease and causing diarrhoea in small children. Easily preventable diseases turn deadly when they find their way into malnourished bodies and when they go untreated due to a lack of medicines no longer permitted into the country because they might be used for war purposes. UNICEF reports a six- to eight-fold increase in the mortality rates in children due to diarrhoea and pneumonia from 1991 to 1996. In a recent survey, UNICEF reported that, as of

mid-1999, the deaths of over 500,000 children under 5 were directly related to economic sanctions and the policies of the Iraqi Government in response to these sanctions. The combined effect of economic sanctions and the policies of the Iraqi Government have also led hundreds of thousands of Iraqis to flee their homeland. It is estimated that there are at present between 150,000 and 200,000 Iraqi refugees living in Jordan, and many more have fled to other parts of the world. These refugees are often forced to live in very poor conditions without legal status or the right to work.

4. The Commission on Human Rights should do everything in its power to ensure first of all that aid is given immediately to alleviate the pressing needs of the people in Iraq and the Iraqi refugees who live in neighbouring countries and have no access to help. At the same time, the current comprehensive sanctions should be lifted. UNICEF, the World Food Programme and others should get direct access to the people in need. The Commission on Human Rights should take steps to see that the suffering population indeed has access to relief. In order to promote further compliance with human rights standards in Iraq, Pax Christi International urges the Commission to broaden and extend the mandate of the Special Rapporteur for Iraq or to have a permanent representative of the High Commissioner for Human Rights in Iraq with the mandate to monitor the human rights situation in the whole of Iraq.